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TRADE UNIONISM

AND

THE CLASS WAR.

BY

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FURTHER CHAPTERS FROM THE AUTHOR'S
LARGER WORK ON "ORGANISATION."



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TRADE UNIONISM AND THE CLASS WAR.

The historical success of the Trade Union movement—at least, as far as Great Britain is concerned—may be said to date from the struggle of the Tolpuddle Martyrs for the right of combination eight years after the repeal of the combination laws, and under the Reform Ministry of 1832. From this time onwards, assisted by the glamour of romance thus cast over its being, having its basis laid deep down in the social necessities of the epoch, Trade Unionism, from being an illegal conspiracy, began to qualify for its later position as the sign-manual of skilled labour. It has come to be more and more admitted that the law of supply and demand does *not* determine, with exactness, the nominal, or even the actual, price of the commodity, labour-power. And it has come to be claimed that Trade Unions do enable their members to increase the amount of the price received for their labour-power, without being hurtful to the interests of the commonwealth—*i.e.*, the capitalist class,—when conducted with moderation and fairness. This passage from outlawry to respectability has not been secured without surrender of principle and consistency. The Trade Unionist apologist is quite prepared to defend restrictive tendencies that must destroy the revolutionary solidarity of labour by their creation of blacklegs. He rejoices in a craft-organisation that materially injures the interests of labour as a whole, without even benefitting it sectionally. He has no qualms of conscience about a representative system of administration which can only betray the worker to capitalist interests. From all of which it may safely be concluded that if it can be shown that the law of supply and demand *does* determine, with exactness, the nominal as well as the actual price of the commodity, labour-power, the best that can be said for the necessity of Trade Unionism will have ceased to possess any intelligible meaning. Such, then, is our task in the present brochure.

THE CASE FOR TRADE UNIONISM.

By nominal wages, I mean wages actually received in cash irrespective of the conditions of employment; and by actual wages nominal wages plus the conditions of employment, hours of labour &c. What is the basis of such wages? Marx has asked us to suppose that an average hour of labour be realised in a value equal to sixpence, or twelve average hours of labour realised in six shillings. If, then, in the raw material, machinery and so forth used up in a commodity, twenty-four hours of average labour were realised, its value would amount to twelve shillings. If, moreover the workman employed by the capitalist added twelve hours of labour to these means of production these twelve hours would be realised in an additional value of six shillings. The total value of the production would, therefore, amount to thirty-six hours of realised labour-power, and be equal to eighteen shillings. But as the value of labour-power, or the wages paid to the workman, would be three shillings only, no equivalent would have been paid by the capitalist for the six hours of surplus value worked by the workman and realised in the value of the commodity. By selling this commodity at its value for eighteen shillings, the capitalist would, therefore, realise a value of three shillings for which he had paid no equivalent. These three shillings would constitute the surplus value or profit pocketed by him. Any increase in the wages of the worker must reduce the amount of his surplus value, since that is the only fund out of which such increase could be obtained. Is it possible for the worker to secure such an increase? If so, is it possible for the wages of the workman to rise so high as not only to approximately equal the value of his product, but to *actually* equal it. In a word, if the law of supply and demand works with the inexactness assumed by the Trade Unionist to be the case, palliation is not merely justifiable on the grounds of expediency; it is the direct path to emancipation.

Is it true that the law of supply and demand fixes the price with so little exactness, that supply and demand become equal not at an exact point of price? May it be that several prices, or a range of prices, will satisfy the requirements of the law? That there is, or may be, a kind of table-land within which the law does not operate? Let us take the Trade Union political economists' typical example. A hundredweight of fish is sold by Dutch Auction, *i.e.*, the seller bidding down instead of the buyers bidding

up One buyer may be willing to give 20s. for the lot, and no other buyer willing to give more than 18s. By the Dutch Auction, it is claimed, the buyer will take the offer at 20s., while by English Auction the bidding will stop at 18s., and the man who is willing to give 20s. will get the fish at 18s. or a fraction over it. So that in the same market, with the same quantity of fish for sale, and with customers in number and every other respect the same, the same lot of fish might fetch two very different prices, the law of supply and demand being equally and completely fulfilled by either of these prices. Within a limit of 2s. the law is inoperative.

Now, it is claimed, that in a case such as this, much depends on who has the initiative in bargaining. In the instance given, the possessor of the initiative gives to the seller a distinct gain of 2s., not accounted for by the law of supply and demand. Supposing the price of labour-power to fall within a similarly excepted-category, the same principle as operated against the buyer in the case of the Dutch Auction will now operate against the seller in the labour-market. It is the buyer who has the initiative in fixing the price. The employer, the purchaser of labour-power, makes the offer of wages. The dealer or seller, *i.e.*, the labourer, accepts or refuses. The advantage of the initiative is with the employer, therefore. This can only be modified by a close combination among the employed, whereby they may place a reserve price on their labour. Under these circumstances, Organised Labour may secure a larger positive amount of the produce of its labour-power, within the limits not covered by the law of supply and demand. It may therefore secure the economic equivalent of culture by virtue of its organised status.

Outside of this table-land the law of supply and demand remains intact. The more numerous the competitors for employment the lower will the wages be, other things being equal. This fact forces on the attention of the Trade Unionist the necessity for restrictive rules, forbidding the employment of non-unionists and limiting the number of apprentices. Such rules are indispensable to the complete efficacy of Trade Unionism. It makes him the apologist for an aristocracy of skilled labour. Its final refuge is Malthusiasm. Its specious pretence is that the ignorant and untrained part of the proletariat will people up to the point that will keep their wages at that miserable rate which the low scale of their ideas and habits makes endurable to them. As long as their minds remain in such a state, the Unionist claims that he does

them no real injury in preventing them from competing with him for employment. He only saves himself from being brought down to their level. He does no wrong by entrenching himself behind a barrier to exclude those whose competition would bring down his wages, without more than momentarily raising theirs.

Again, even were it to be shown that Trade Unionism did not increase the nominal rate of wages, it has to be admitted (so say the Unionist) that it is able to do much by raising the actual rate of wages. Its least accomplishment is to successfully resist irritating, arbitrary, and oppressive conditions of employment. But the power of the organisation of labour in this direction turns upon its recognition. In times of dispute there may be room for negotiations between employers and employed upon the question of maximum or minimum demands. For the Trade Union to be effectual there can be no room for compromise on the question of recognising the Union and receiving the Union's official representatives. This limits all need or apprehension of a strike to such recognition. So that the right of combination recognised, the men's demands become a matter of amicable arrangement.

Such is the case for Trade Unionism. We now propose to expose its fallacies, and lay bare its hideous hypocrisies.

II.

THE WORKERS' CASE AGAINST TRADE UNIONISM.

The reply to the argument which I have developed in defence of Trade Unionism in the foregoing section, naturally divides itself into the following divisions:—

(1) *The operation of the economic law against the possibility of palliation, so far as the entire working-class is concerned:—* Although it is true that the law of supply and demand does not fix the terms of any particular bargain, the operation of that law does not finish with the conclusion of that particular bargain. This has been clearly demonstrated by Cree in his reply to Mill. According to whether buyer or seller secures what is termed "a bargain," demand or supply is checked or stimulated. This applies to the Dutch Auction Fish Sale. A sale of 20s. would tend to stimulate future supply and check demand. The consequent tendency would be towards a fall in price. A sale of 18s. would tend to bring out more buyers and reduce the induce-

ment to go to sea. The consequent tendency would be towards a rise in price. This would bring out more sellers and reduce the number of buyers once more. This is true also of the wages of labour. Higher wages bring out more workers but reduce the employer's profits. So that the employer becomes less anxious to secure workers. A lower wage has the reverse effect. The worker now become less anxious to be employed. But the employer is more willing to employ. Once more there is repetition. Working by tendency only, the economic law approaches exactitude over a multiplicity of cases, but not in any particular case. The mean of the oscillations of price is now an exact point, not a range of prices. The terms of any particular bargain are, consequently, only of the *most transient* importance even to those immediately concerned. But they are of little or no importance to the workers or employers as a class, since they are constantly being brought back to their true economical point. The compensating influences being inevitable and automatic, it will be seen that, in its position as a class, the working-class has nothing to gain from Trade Union palliative activity. Its only practical hope, as well as its beautiful day-dream, is, first, last, and all-the-time, Socialism—the Communal Individualism of which Oscar Wilde has made himself the prophet in that magnificent book, *The Soul of Man*.

(2) *The impossibility of raising actual wages without regard to nominal wages*:—Mavor has put the case in a nutshell. If a reduction of the hours of labour results in decreased production, wages will fall, other things being equal. If reduction of hours results in maintenance of production per man there will be no additional employment, other things being equal. The equality of other things turn upon the law of supply and demand which palliative combination does not effect. Consequently, Trade Unionism can neither effect wages nor yet the question of employment.

(3) *The impossibility of organising the whole of labour on the basis of Trade Unionism*:—The Trade Unionist, when excluding the blackleg and manufacturing him, pretends to look forward to a complete federation of labour. But if all labour stands upon the platform of palliative combination—a very different thing from revolutionary solidarity—the effect will be nil, in view of the operations of the law of supply and demand. A union of all labour is as good as no union at all from the

palliationist viewpoint. Even a "minimum wage" of higher rate than at present established means only the decreased purchasing power of money. Between labour-power as a commodity and other commodities there exists a definite ratio of exchange. So that a "minimum wage" is meaningless. But a union of all labour on the basis of Trade Unionism is impossible. With all trades organised on a restricted basis it would be impossible for any trade to rid itself of its surplus by causing them to be absorbed into any other trade. But for Trade Unionism to succeed—with the increasing use of machinery and the consequent reduction of skilled to unskilled labour—it must also organise unskilled labour. Such organisation to succeed must be even more restrictive than in the case of skilled labour. Unskilled labour cannot, therefore, absorb the surplus from all the skilled trades. Not only so, but to this surplus it would add an enormous surplus of its own. So that restrictive Unionism can only result in first deluding the working-class, then betraying it, and finally reducing the greater portion of it to blacklegs in the present and future.

(4) *The menace of Trade Union Representation; A question of Labour Leading*:—Trade Unionism embodies the menace of the representative system in its constitution no less certainly than the legislative machine. Its elected leaders conclude strikes and disputes by consenting to terms of compromise offered by Capitalistic Ministers for Labour, and Presidents of the Board of Trade. To pretend that such terms of agreement are antagonistic to capitalist interests, is to be disturbed by a bogey. Capitalist Cabinet Ministers are keenly alive to capitalist interests. On the other hand, for what does the strike-leader generally strive? To get his authority recognised. This is the first step to position and power. It is pretended that the greater the support given to the labour-leader the greater the concessions he can wring from the capitalist class. It is forgotten that the greater the confidence reposed in him, the more effectually he can betray that confidence. Consequently, your "official" strike-leader is always for "enthusiasm and earnestness" of the "slow and sure" variety. His plea is for caution, which means that he is to be allowed to do the bargaining but not be submitted to criticism. Criticism he regards as a menace to his authority. It certainly reduces his selling-out value.

(5) *The Initiative Absurdity*:—The Trade Unionist

argument that the unorganised worker suffers from not having the initiative is nonsense. Rather—if it really counted, which it does not—one's sympathy should be with the employer who uses it against the unorganised worker. In the case of the *organised* Trade Unionist, it should be with the worker who is menaced by having it used on his behalf by the Labour leader who generally succeeds in misrepresenting him. Everyone knows that employers often throw the onus of initiative on the worker. In a bargain both buyer and seller are anxious only to avoid it. "What do you want?" says the buyer. "That is not the question, what will you give?" replies the seller. Both parties are desirous of securing a bargain, and consequently avoid the initiative. It has no advantages although it operates, very little, one way or the other in the labour market. So that Trade Unionism has nothing to offer the worker in this respect.

ON THESE COUNTS, THEREFORE, AND FOR THESE REASONS TRADE UNIONISM MUST GO. THE ONLY HOPE OF THE WORKERS IS REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM.

III.

THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION.

Much of what I have urged in the foregoing section of the present brochure has tended to negate the idea of majority rule, as also the representation principle. Like most rebels—and, for that matter, most students of history—I have no faith in the majority, less unbelief in the minority, and most reliance in the individual. Thomas Paine regarded Government as being, like dress, a badge of lost innocence. He also looked upon the abolition of formal government as the beginning of true association. This seems to me to be incontrovertible. Consequently, if my opinion be correct, representation, as an expression of formal government, can have no weight, and must necessarily play a small part in the revolutionary birth-struggle of the proletarian commonweal.

To bring this theory down to the realm of the practical, I want the reader to consider with me the following case which has often been put to me in the course of debates and discussions in which I have played the part of principal. It has been said that if a certain individual was working in a shop where sixty men were employed, and fifty wished to come out on strike whilst ten wished to remain in, the author of this hypothetical case was in favour of coercing the ten and making them come out, whilst the fifty fought the "boss." Such coercion, it is urged, alone will rid the proletariat of their subjection to the capitalist and Capitalism.

From this opinion I venture to differ. Indeed, I repeat in print what I have often urged on the platform in reply to the hypothetical case already enunciated that the majority have no more right to coerce a minority than the minority have to coerce a majority. The fifty have no more right to coerce the ten, than the ten have to coerce the fifty, since in relation to society, the hypothetical fifty strikers are but a small minority, and if it be true that many are right where few are wrong, then the presence of seventy strike-breakers in the neighbourhood of the strike plus seventy soldiers, would entitle the "majority" of 150 men, as opposed to the minority of fifty, to "coerce them" out of the neighbourhood. Herein lies the capitalist apology for Mitchelstown, Featherstone, Homestead, Belfast, and every other scene of the patriotic murder of the working-class by the hired assassins of profit mongers. For it must be remembered, that we are not treating of the ethics of coercion in relation to oppressed minorities, but of the economics of apparent majorities' rights to coerce a minority. If we were to consent to deal with probabilities rather than with facts, it would be urged that the one hundred and fifty men do not represent society, nor the whole working-class, for it is probable that the latter would stand by the fifty. But yet every worker, as also every employer, knows that the news of the strike could be flashed throughout the length and breadth of the land, without the official scoundrelism which imported blacklegs being denounced to the extent of all the workers striking in sympathy and thus threatening to coerce the blacklegs who were in a minority. With all their feelings of sympathy and faithful devotion to the cause of united endeavour, for three reasons, it would be impossible for the whole working-class organisations to exhibit any industrial solidarity. In the first place, if all the workers were willing to strike, they need only stay in work and take over the means and instruments of production for their own use, the revolution being therefore a political one; in which event they would not be concerned with craft or industrial divisional organisation, nor with the local coercion of blacklegs, nor with the propaganda-strike even, but with the emancipation of their class only. In the second place this would mean the negation of the necessity for "physical force" coercion of blacklegs, since the economic existence of gentlemen of this fraternity could only become impossible under such circumstances; whilst, thirdly, if all the workers were educated up to that stage of economic solidarity, that they were willing to strike in sympathy and massacre blacklegs according to Union-laid regulations, the working-class revolution would be international and spontaneous, as we have already hinted, and there would be no strike for higher nominal, nor for higher actual, wages; only the coming together of the workers internationally for the political and industrial overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the taking of whatever united industrial and political activity the Class War demanded by way of its culminating expression. If, however, the workers declined to strike in sympathy,

it would only be because they did not sympathise industrially with the revolting fifty ; yet, as consumers and fellow wage slaves, by the logic of economic production and distribution, they would be affected alike by the existence of the strike and its termination. The question as to whether they were right in passively siding with the employees, or no, does not enter into the problem as stated by the bourgeois or pseudo-proletarian defender of representation, the only question being the right of the majority. And, as I have shown, the majority is opposed to this gentlemen and his forty-nine imaginary colleagues. Then his position is slightly altered, and the manifesto of the resolute fifty is now addressed to the whole of the rest of the working-class, which is engaged not in striking in sympathy, but in passively siding with local minority of blacklegs and the Capitalist class. The manifesto, therefore, should now run: "Being in a shop where sixty men are at work, and fifty of us want to strike, and ten do not, I am in favour of coercing the ten and making them come out, while we fifty fight the "boss." As the rest of the working-class and the whole of the Capitalist class side with the "boss" and the ten non-strikers, I am in favour of coercing the majority of my own class and the whole of the Capitalist class also."

What would be society's answer? Why, that of the Trade Unionist - apologist - or - strike - believer - in - majority righteousness! Thus, a worker who was not in favour of the striker would say:— "If I am in a society where a vast majority of the proletariat can have their present ill-being intensified, and poverty added to their poverty, by fifty men going on strike, I am in favour of coercing the fifty and making them go back to work, whilst we, the majority of the workers, meet the "boss" through our representatives on arbitration and conciliation boards, and through peaceful agencies, secure higher wages and better conditions." And then, may be, the revolting strike defender would turn aside, with his sturdy band of followers, numbering fifty-nine all told, and, sighing somewhat critically, relieve his feelings by giving utterance to the following piece of philosophy: "The majority have no more right to coerce a minority than the minority have to coerce a majority. The fifty have no more right to coerce the ten than the ten have to coerce the fifty. Society has no more right to coerce the fifty strikers than the fifty strikers have to coerce society. But the minority has as much right to coerce the majority as the majority has to coerce the minority. Ten strikers have as much right to coerce fifty non-strikers as fifty strikers have to coerce ten non-strikers. And society has as much right, and no more, to coerce fifty strikers as fifty strikers have to coerce society. Where might reigns rights do not exist. Where the political reflex of industrial complexity is centralization of control and administration, individual autonomy is impossible. The only question is: Seeing that the emancipation of the working-class means the emancipation of the world, and seeing

that we base our argument on logic and reason, and that by quiet and resolute activity the workers can be brought together in one revolutionary "Impossibilist" movement to tie up the workshops of the world, amid the anathemas and violence of impotent Capitalism struggling in its death-throes; seeing that violence *against our own class* can never atone for the violence of the capitalist against us, but only make for an orgie of bloodshed which will delay the sure and certain overthrow of parasitism; seeing, in fact, that Socialism is inevitable and that the very oppression of the working-class constitutes its final economic and political strength, is extraneous violence, *i.e.*, an interference with the liberty of the strike-breaker by virtue of physical force above and beyond the law of economic effect in production, distribution, and consumption, advisable in the interests of the workers to-day, and the securement of the common-weal for which they are striving?"

This, I repeat, is the question which our physical force constitutional palliationist, supposing he understood the situation, would ask himself. My reply—since I own no arsenals, have no monopoly of gatling or Maxim guns, and am not a Nonconformist Cabinet Minister—would be "no," especially since, in accordance with the law of social evolution, I believe in conserving all the principles of past progress in the direction of liberty. And freedom, so far as economic tendencies permit, I hold to be such a principle. Indeed, the fact that I have to so qualify it, means that the right of freedom is admitted, with rare, if any, exceptions, so long as the economic *status quo* is not disturbed. And though the expression of the Class struggle will be political, its basis will be economic, so that it can no longer be willed into a physical force one. It does not require that the reader should agree with me on this point for him to realise that no prerogative to murder, boycott, or coerce is specially invested in the majority, because the deity of abstract rights has decided that the majority is the majority; that, if coercion be right, its successfulness must decide its employment, and that, successful or otherwise, it is no more right for the minority than the majority to coerce, and neither more nor less obligatory upon it not to do so. This, however, is my position—as a Socialist—of equal rights for majority and minority, which, being recognised, would not lead to the hopeless confusion that majority rule does. And it is a confusion of bourgeois begetting, leading to the experiences of Motherwell, Hull, Grimsby, Featherstone, Penrhyn, Mitchelstown, and Belfast, whereas, as I have shown, its negation in the terms of my position is based upon the economics of the Class War. Our Trade Unionist friend, however, with his loose revolutionary violence and threatening, as opposed to a sound revolutionary activity, finding himself either consciously or unconsciously on the side of bourgeois society, will insist that there must be representation and delegation of authority.

To this I reply with the statement of Marxian philosophy, that every industrial epoch has its own system of representation. The fact that minority and majority rule find their harmonious expression in the political bureaucratic autocracy of capitalism signifies that its negation in the terms of Socialism shall embody a counter affirmative which embody the principle of true organisation and freedom of the individual idiosyncrasy. What the details of that organisation will be shall be made the subject of discussion in another essay from my pen. That it will not be "a Socialist majority" can be seen from the fact that our analysis has shown that democracy merely signifies the surrender of majority incompetence and mis-education to the interests of minority expertism and bourgeois concentration of its power over the lives and destinies of the exploited proletarians, no less through the medium of the worker's Trade and Industrial Union, than through that of the Capitalist State, which Marx so truly conceived of as being but an executive committee for administering the affairs of the whole bourgeois class, which has stripped of its halo every profession previously venerated and regarded as honourable, and thus turned doctor, lawyer, priest, poet, philosopher, and labour leader into its paid wage workers. Out of such a social system there can no more emerge a "representation" which signifies an honest attempt to secure just exposition of principles and expressions of antagonistic interests, than there can emerge from out of the barren wilderness of voluntaristic money-juggling proudhonism a "freedom" which signifies real personal liberty of being. True organisation like true liberty belongs to the future—and the Socialist Commonwealth; or, as I have termed it elsewhere, the Anarchist Republic.



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